

Build Consensus

The goal of consensus building is to get individuals who hold different views on an issue to share information and negotiate to arrive at a mutually acceptable course of action. Consensus is not always possible in every situation but is a desirable goal, particularly in communities. A majority vote does not represent a consensus.

Begin building consensus by asking each individual for their opinion. For consensus to work, each should be willing to accept less than everything they want in order to help the association toward its goal.

Keep in mind the following tips to help your community reach consensus:

- ***Rank problems and/or solutions.***
- ***Brainstorm*** to help generate ideas in a short period of time.
- ***Encourage interaction*** in meetings, which may result in a consensus.
- ***Use negotiation techniques.***
- ***Create a focus group.*** Members of this group will help describe the problem or define others' perception.

The National Parks Service has an excellent resource for consensus building available on their website. You can find some of the following information and other useful tools at:

www.nps.gov/phso/rtcatoobox/index_comtoolbox.htm.

Use Brainstorming Tools

- ***Basic Technique:*** Break into small groups (15 people or less). Arrange chairs in a circle to allow everyone to see each other. Set aside a specific amount of time.

Describe questions that the group will respond to and check for understanding. Request that individuals not discuss the merits of each idea until all ideas have been recorded.

Write down all ideas on a flip chart. Print large, legibly and fast. Repeat back key words and phrases and be sure to ask the speaker to clarify ideas you do not understand. Build on and expand ideas. Push the group to consider other ways of looking at the issue in order to stimulate more ideas.

- ***Silent Thinking and Writing:*** Present a question or statement and ask individuals to spend 5 to 15 minutes reflecting, and then writing down their responses. Responses can either be handed in and a facilitator reads them to the group. Consider asking each individual to share if there are individuals who seem quiet or reluctant to speak.

- **Round Robin:** Ask each individual in turn to share one idea at a time until either there are no more ideas or the time limit is reached. Try reversing the direction of calling on people.
- **Popcorn:** Ideas are called out randomly and quickly.
- **Discussion Brainstorm:** Have a discussion about the question or issue for a specific amount of time, say 5 to 10 minutes. Then run the brainstorm, describing key ideas that came up.
- **Sticky Notes:** Each individual is given 5 minutes to think about a response to the question or issue. As an alternative pair individuals up to generate ideas. Individuals or pairs are asked to record their responses on as many sticky notes as necessary. The stick notes are then given to the facilitator who reads them and sticks them on the wall or a flip chart. Similar ideas are then grouped.
- **Reverse Brainstorming:** The first half of this technique is identical to Basic Technique. Once that exercise is over, re-state the question as its total opposite as a “worst case” question. Begin brainstorming again using the mirror image question. This time, after the answers are recorded, the facilitator “flips” each answer to its opposite. The answers from both exercises are then combined.